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MAILED

JAN 22 2013

OFFICE OF PETITIONS

In re Patent of :
Madhavan Pisharodi :
Patent No. 6,309,421 :
Issue Date: 10/30/2001 :
Application No 09/290831 : DECISION
Filing or 371(c) Date: 04/13/1999 : ON PETITION
Title of Invention:
ROTATING, LOCKING INTERVERTEBRAL :
DISK STABILIZER AND APPLICATOR :
:

This is a decision on the petition under 37 CFR § 1.378(b), to reinstate the above-identified patent, filed December 3, 2012.

The petition is **DISMISSED**.

Any further petition to reinstate the above-identified patent must be submitted within TWO (2) MONTHS from the mail date of this decision. Extensions of time under 37 CFR 1.136(a) are permitted. The reconsideration request should include a cover letter entitled "Renewed Petition under 37 CFR 1.137." This is **not** final agency action within the meaning of 5 U.S.C. § 704.

Background

The patent issued October 30, 2001. Patentee could have paid the seven and one half (7½) year maintenance fee between October 30, 2008, and April 30, 2009, without a surcharge, or within the six (6) month grace period between May 1, 2009 and October 30, 2009. Patentee failed to do so; accordingly, the patent became expired on October 31, 2009.

The present petition

Patentee files the present petition and states that payment of the maintenance fee was unavoidably delayed because the patent owner's attorney of record, Mr. Wisner, failed to continue his duty of apprising the patent owner that the maintenance fee was due.

In support of this assertion, petitioner files a copy of a letter from the inventor to Mr. Wisner, dated February 20, 2012, wherein the inventor, *inter alia*, accuses the attorney of failing to follow-up on the inventors suggestions, and failing in some of his legal duties, and requesting the attorney transfer the inventor's files to Ms. Usher Menon, petitioner herein.

Petitioner also files a copy of a letter from current counsel, Ms. Menon to the former attorney requesting the attorney schedule a time for Ms. Menon to retrieve the inventor's files.

Petitioner provides that the inventor made several requests to meet with Mr. Wisner to discuss his patent portfolio, and to retrieve his patent files but the requests went unanswered. Petitioner provides that the inventor, who was unaware of the expiration of the patent, engaged new counsel: Ms. Menon, to represent him in his Intellectual Property matters.

Applicable Law, Rules and MPEP

35 U.S.C. 41(b), MAINTENANCE FEES, states:

The Director shall charge the following fees for maintaining in force all patents based on applications filed on or after December 12, 1980:

- (1) 3 years and 6 months after grant, \$980.
- (2) 7 years and 6 months after grant, \$2,480.
- (3) 11 years and 6 months after grant, \$4,110.

Unless payment of the applicable maintenance fee is received in the United States Patent and Trademark Office on or before the date the fee is due or within a grace period of 6 months thereafter, the patent will expire as of the end of such grace period. The Director may require the payment of a surcharge as a condition of accepting within such 6-month grace period the payment of an applicable maintenance fee. No fee may be established for maintaining a design or plant patent in force.

37 CFR 1.378(b) provides that a patent may be reinstated at any time following expiration of the patent for failure to timely pay a maintenance fee. A petition to accept late payment of a maintenance fee, where the delay was unavoidable, must include:

- (A) the required maintenance fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.20(e)-(g);
- (B) the surcharge set forth in 37 CFR 1.20(i)(1); and
- (C) a showing that the delay was unavoidable since reasonable care was taken to ensure that the maintenance fee would be paid timely and that the petition was filed promptly after the patentee was notified of, or otherwise became aware of, the expiration of the patent.

The required showing must enumerate the steps taken to ensure timely payment of the maintenance fee, the date and the manner in which patentee became aware of the expiration of the patent, and the steps taken to file the petition promptly. Furthermore, an adequate showing requires a statement by all persons with direct knowledge of the cause of the delay, setting forth the facts as they know them. Copies of all documentary evidence referred to in a statement should be furnished as exhibits to the statement. (Emphasis supplied).

As language in 35 U.S.C. § 41(c)(1) is identical to that in 35 U.S.C. § 133 (i.e., “unavoidable” delay), a late maintenance fee for the unavoidable delay standard is considered under the same standard for reviving an abandoned application under 35 U.S.C. § 133. See Ray v. Lehman, 55 F.3d 606, 608-09, 34 USPQ2d 1786, 1787 (Fed. Cir. 1995) (quoting In re Patent No. 4,409,763, 7 USPQ2d 1798, 1800 (Comm'r Pat. 1988), aff'd sub nom. Rydeen v. Quigg, 748 F. Supp. 900, 16 USPQ2d 1876 (D.D.C. 1990), aff'd, 937 F.2d 623 (Fed. Cir. 1991) (table), cert. denied, 502 U.S. 1075 (1992)). See MPEP § 711.03(c) for a general discussion of the “unavoidable” delay standard.

Because 35 U.S.C. § 41(c) requires the payment of fees at specified intervals to maintain a patent in force, rather than some response to a specific action by the Office under 35 U.S.C. § 133, a reasonably prudent person in the exercise of due care and diligence would have taken steps to ensure the timely payment of such maintenance fees. Ray, 55 F.3d at 609, 34 USPQ2d at 1788. That is, an adequate showing that the delay in payment of the maintenance fee at issue was “unavoidable” within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. § 41(c) and 37 CFR 1.378(b)(3) requires a showing of the steps taken to ensure the timely payment of the maintenance fees for this patent. Id. Thus, where the record fails to disclose that the patentee took reasonable steps, or discloses that the patentee took no steps, to ensure timely payment of the maintenance fee, 35 U.S.C. 41(c) and 37 CFR 1.378(b)(3) preclude acceptance of the delayed payment of the maintenance fee under 37 CFR 1.378(b).

In view of the requirement to enumerate the steps taken to ensure timely payment of the maintenance fee, the patentee's lack of knowledge of the need to pay the maintenance fee and the failure to receive the Maintenance Fee Reminder does not constitute unavoidable delay. See Patent No. 4,409,763, *supra*. See also Final Rule entitled “Final Rules for Patent Maintenance Fees,” published in the Federal Register at 49 Fed. Reg. 34716, 34722-23 (August 31, 1984), and republished in the Official Gazette at 1046 Off. Gaz. Pat. Office 28, 34 (September 25, 1984). Under the statutes and rules, the Office has no duty to notify patentees of the requirement to pay maintenance fees or to notify patentees when the maintenance fees are due. It is solely the responsibility of the patentee to assure that the maintenance fee is timely paid to prevent expiration of the patent. The lack of knowledge of the requirement to pay a maintenance fee and the failure to receive the Maintenance Fee Reminder will not shift the burden of monitoring the time for paying a maintenance fee from the patentee to the Office. Thus, evidence that despite reasonable care on behalf of the patentee and/or the patentee's agents, and reasonable steps to ensure timely payment, the maintenance fee was unavoidably not paid, could be submitted in support of an argument that the delay in payment was unavoidable.

Moreover, the Patent and Trademark Office must rely on the actions or inactions of duly authorized and voluntarily chosen representatives of the applicant, and applicant is bound by the consequences of those actions or inactions. Link v. Wabash, 370 U.S. 626, 633-34 (1962); Huston v. Ladner, 973 F.2d 1564, 1567, 23 USPQ2d 1910, 1913 (Fed. Cir. 1992); see also Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 317, 5 USPQ2d 1130, 1132 (D.N. Ind. 1987). Specifically, petitioner's delay caused by the actions or inactions of his voluntarily chosen representative does not constitute unavoidable delay within the meaning of 35 USC 133 or 37 CFR 1.137(a). Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 5 USPQ2d 1130 (D. Ind. 1987); Smith v. Diamond, 209 USPQ 1091 (D.D.C. 1981); Potter v. Dann, 201 USPQ 574 (D.D.C. 1978); Ex parte Murray, 1891

Dec. Comm'r Pat. 130, 131 (Comm'r Pat. 1891). In re Mattullath, 38 App. D.C. 497, 514-15 (1912)(quoting Ex parte Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31, 32-33 (1887)); see also Winkler v. Ladd, 221 F. Supp. 550, 552, 138 USPQ 666, 167-68 (D.D.C. 1963), aff'd, 143 USPQ 172 (D.C. Cir. 1963); Ex parte Henrich, 1913 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 139, 141 (1913).

Opinion

Petitioner alleges that payment of the maintenance fee was unavoidably delayed because the patent owner's attorney of record failed to continue his duty of apprising the patent owner that the maintenance fee was due. Petitioner is advised that a delay caused by the actions or inactions of a Patentee's duly authorized and voluntarily chosen representative, does not constitute unavoidable delay. Petitioner states that the inventor made several requests to meet with Mr. Wisner to discuss his patent portfolio, and to retrieve his patent files but the requests went unanswered. Petitioner provides that the inventor, who was unaware of the expiration of the patent. Petitioner, however, may not rely upon a delay caused by the actions or inactions of its attorney to support an assertion that payment of the maintenance fee was unavoidable. While Petitioner may have an issue with its attorney, this Office is not the proper venue for resolving such issues.

Petitioner should note that a breakdown of communication between petitioner and their client is not considered to be grounds for granting a petition for late payment of the maintenance fee under the unavoidable standard. See, Ray v. Lehman, 55 F.3d 606, 608-09, 34 USPQ2d 1786, 1787 (Fed. Cir. 1995).

Conclusion

The evidence has been considered; however, Petitioner has failed to demonstrate that the failure to pay the maintenance fee was unavoidable. The petition is dismissed.

Petitioner's current options

I. Petitioner may file a request for reconsideration.

If reconsideration of this decision is desired, a petition for reconsideration must be filed within TWO (2) MONTHS from the mail date of this decision. The petition for reconsideration should be entitled "Petition for Reconsideration under 37 CFR 1.378(b)." Any petition for reconsideration of this decision must be accompanied by a non-refundable petition fee of \$400 as set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(h).

After a decision on the petition for reconsideration, no further reconsideration or review of the matter will be undertaken by the Commissioner. Therefore, it is extremely important that petitioner supply any and all relevant information and documentation with his request for reconsideration. The Director's decision will be based solely on the administrative record in existence. Petitioner should remember that it is not enough that the delay was unavoidable; petitioner must prove that the delay was unavoidable. A petition will not be granted if petitioner provides insufficient evidence to 'show' that the delay was unavoidable. Therefore, if a request for reconsideration is filed, it must establish that the entire delay in the submission of the maintenance fee was unavoidable.

II. Petitioner may request a refund of the maintenance fee and surcharge which accompanied the petition.

Petitioner may request a refund of the maintenance fee and surcharge by writing to the Office of Finance, Refund Section, Director for Patents, Washington, DC, 20231. A copy of this decision should accompany petitioner's request.

Further correspondence with respect to this matter should be addressed as follows:

By mail: Mail Stop PETITIONS
Director for Patents
PO Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

By FAX: (571) 273-0025
Attn: Office of Petitions

By hand: Customer Service Window
Randolph Building
401 Dulany Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

Telephone inquiries concerning this matter should be directed to the undersigned at (571) 272-3232.

/DLW/

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